6.

Mixt Essays

Upon { Tragedies, Comedies, Italian Comedies, English Comedies, And Opera's.

Written Originally in FRENCH,
By the *Sieur de Saint EVVREMONT.*

Licensed,
August 12, 1685.
Rog. L'Estrange.

LONDON:
Printed for *Timothy Goodwin*, at the Maiden-Head, over against St. *Dunstan's* Church in *Fleetstreet.*
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PREFACE
TO THE
Tranſlation.

THE Theatre *was wont to be called the School of Virtue, the Scene of Men and Manners*; Ariſtotle *himſelf, though an auſtere* Critick, *and a ſevere* Philoſopher, *confeſſed that the* Stage *might conduce more to the Inſtruction and Refining of Mankind, than even* Philoſophy *it ſelf: It ſecretly inſinuates that into many dull people, which the beſt Books, or grave Harangues could never do; the Eye being ſtruck with the natural Impreſſions, and lively Repreſentations of Vertue and Vice, conveys them quickly to the Soul, and there lodges them; who can ſee the Ambitious, the Proud, the Cruel, the Paſſionate, the Treacherous, the Prodigal, or Covetous Man acted to the life, without being an enemy to them; or the Magna-*

nimous, Liberal, Courageous, Juſt, Mild, Temperate, and Wiſe, without being a friend to, and imitator of them, the Reward and Pleaſure of theſe being always as great as the Puniſhment and Pain of the other. Hence it was that the Greeks *and* Romans *were civiliz'd above other Nations, inſtead of being idle they were employed daily in their* Cirques, Theaters, *and* Amphitheaters, *where they learnt inſenſibly what was great and uſeful; preſent objects raiſes laſting* Idea's, *whereas the Precepts of the Schools vaniſhes, and dwindles often into Air; the Memory will ſeldom part with any thing that comes in by the Eye, eſpecially in ſo ſolemn and ſenſible a manner; the Image or Picture ſticks cloſe to the Brain, and can ſcarce be razed out with the all-devouring teeth of Time.*

The late Age hath been ſo extremely ſenſible of the uſe of the Stage, that ſome of the moſt polite Scholars of Chriſtendom *have ſtudied and practiſed nothing more than* Ariſtotle, *and* Horace, Homer, *and* Virgil, Sophocles, *and* Euripides, Eſchylus, Ariſtophanes, Plautus, *and* Terence. *The* Italians *having a particular Sagacity above moſt of their Neighbours, began firſt to raiſe it from the Grave, where* Goths *and* Vandals, *and other Northern Barbarians, had*

had buried it amongſt the Pomp and Glory of the World; their Academies *took the Carcaſs up, and inſpir'd it with Life, Shape, and ſome Vigour; thoſe of the* Cruſca *at* Florence, *the* Ricovrati *at* Padua, *and the* Lyncei *at* Rome, *have perform'd their parts; many of their* Academicks *began to write of the Stage, and Poetry; ſeveral judicious* Criticks *paſſed for and againſt the* Amynta *of* Taſſo, *and the* Paſtor Fido *of* Guarini.

After the Italians *the* French *took fire, and began to ſublime and purifie themſelves upon the riſing of that glorious Miniſter* Cardinal Richlieu, *who founded the* Royal Academy, *and having muſter'd the beſt Wits together, employ'd them in reforming the Stage, the Language, and Manners of his Country.* L'Abbé Hedelin *undertook the Theater, of which he publiſhed the moſt perfect Treatiſe yet extant; and if the* Cardinal *had liv'd ſome years longer, he would have carried it much higher, and even contended with* Athens, *and* Rome *themſelves:* Malherbe, Corneille, Chapelain, Moliere, Boileau, Fontaine, *and* Rapin, *have cultivated, and exalted that Subject. The Learned* Chanoine *of St.* Geneviéve R. P. *le* Boſſu, *hath given us the beſt* Idea, *and moſt exact Model*

of

of Epick *Poem. The* Dutch *and* Germans *(as though frozen up) have produced little in this kind; yet we muſt confeſs that* Grotius, Heinſius, Scaliger, *and* Voſſius *were Learned* Criticks. *Some of the* Engliſh *have indeed rais'd their Pens, and ſoar'd as high as any of the* Italians, *or* French; *yet* Criticiſm *came but very lately in faſhion amongſt us; without doubt* Ben. Johnſon *had a large ſtock of Critical Learning;* Spencer *had ſtudied* Homer, *and* Virgil, *and* Taſſo, *yet he was miſled, and debauched by* Arioſto, *as Mr.* Rymer *judicionſly obſerves;* Davenant *gives ſome ſtroaks of great Learning and Judgment, yet he is for unbeaten Tracks, new Ways, and undiſcover'd Seas;* Cowley *was a great Maſter of the* Antients, *and had the true* Genius *and Character of a Poet; yet this nicety and boldneſs of* Criticiſm *was a ſtranger all this time to our Climate; Mr.* Rymer, *and Mr.* Dryden *have begun to launch out into it, and indeed they have been very fortunate Adventurers. The* Earls *of* R. *and* M. *and Mr.* W. *have given ſome fine touches; Mr.* Drydens Criticks *are generally quaint and ſolid, his Prefaces doth as often correct and improve my Judgment, as his Verſes doth charm my Fancy; he is every-where Sweet, Elegant,*

and

and Sublime; the Poet *and* Critick *were ſeldom both ſo Conſpicuous and Illuſtrious in one man as in him, except* Rapin. *Mr.* Rymer *in his incomparable Preface to* Rapin, *and in his Reflections upon ſome late* Tragedies, *hath given ſufficient proofs, that he hath ſtudied and underſtands* Ariſtotle *and* Horace, Homer, *and* Virgil, *beſides the* Wits *of all Countries and Ages; ſo that we may juſtly number him in the firſt rank of* Criticks, *as having a moſt accompliſh'd* Idea *of Poetry, and the Stage.*

What Monſieur Euvremont *hath perform'd in theſe his Eſſays upon* Comedy, Tragedy, *and* Opera's, *the Reader will be beſt able to judge upon the peruſal of them; they ſeem to be nice, and delicate, thoughtful and judicious, grounded upon Obſervation, and Reflection, though ſome may perhaps think them daſht here and there with a little* French *levity and vanity; which if ſo, is the more excuſable, conſidering the* Gallantry, *the Variety, and Nature of his Subject. If his Pen marches any where rough and peeviſh, it is upon the* Athenian Tragedians, *upon the* Italian Comedy, *and* Opera's, *upon* Machines, *and* Decorations; *otherwiſe it runs ſmoothly and gently enough, ſeeing true* Criticks *are ſeldom*

dom complaisant, or enamour'd with Minions, *or* Mistresses; *all must go to the Touchstone, or Furnace, and if the tryal is not made according to Rule and Art, then the* Critick *must be toucht, or fluxt himself.*

UPON

UPON TRAGEDIES.

I Confeſs we excel in the works of the Theater, and I think without flattering *Corneille* I may prefer his Tragedies far before thoſe of Antiquity. I know the ancient Tragedians have had admirers in all times, but am not ſo ſure that the ſublimity aſcribed to them reſts upon a good Foundation.

To believe that *Sophocles* and *Euripides* are ſo admirable, as we are told they are, one muſt fancy greater matters of their works, than can be conceived from Tranſlations; and in my opinion, the terms and expreſſion ought to have a great ſhare in their beauty.

Methinks that through the praiſes which their moſt famous Advocates give them, one may perceive, that Greatneſs, Magnificence, and above all, Dignity, were things they little underſtood: Wits they were, indeed, but confined to the ſtock of a ſmall Republick to whom a neceſſitous liberty ſtood inſtead of all things.

When they were obliged to repreſent the Majeſty of a great King, they ill managed an unknown grandeur, becauſe they ſaw nothing but low and clowniſh objects, to which their ſenſes were in a manner enſlaved.

It is true, that the ſame wits being cloy'd with theſe

objects, did sometimes raise themselves to what was sublime and great; but then they brought so many Gods and Goddesses into their Tragedies, that hardly any thing more of Humanity was to be found in them: what was great, was fabulous; what was natural, mean and contemptible.

With *Corneille*, Grandeur sets it self off, the figures he employes when he would embellish it with any ornament, are proper and suitable; but most commonly he neglects the pomp of some certain shews, and borrows not from the Heavens, to give a value to that which is considerable enough upon Earth; it is enough for him to enter well into things, and the full image that he gives of them, makes that true impression which men of sense love to receive.

Indeed, Nature is admirable in all things, and when men have recourse to that forreign pomp wherewith they think to embellish objects; it is many times a tacite confession, that they know not their property; hence come most of our Figures and Comparisons, which I cannot approve, if they be not rare, altogether Noble and Just: otherwise it is a cunning casting about for a diversion to slip away from things which one cannot understand. What beauty nevertheless may be in Comparisons, yet they suite much better with Epick Poem than Tragedy: In Epick Poem the Mind seeks to please it self out of its subject: In Tragedy, the Soul full of thoughts, and possessed with Passions, turns not easily at the flash of a bare resemblance.

But let us return to these Ancients from whom we have insensibly digressed; and to do them justice, let us acknowledge that they have much better succeeded in expressing the qualities of their Heroes, than in describing the magnificence of great Kings. A confused notion of the grandeurs of *Babylon* spoilt rather than raised their ima-

imagination; but their Minds could not be impoſed upon in relation to Strength, Conſtancy, Juſtice and Wiſdom, whereof they had inſtances daily before their eyes. Their Senſes weaned from pomp in a mean Republick, left their Reaſon at greater liberty to conſider men in themſelves.

Thus nothing took them off from the ſtudy of Humane Nature, and from applying themſelves to the knowledge of Vice and Virtue, Inclinations and Tempers: Here it is that they have learnt to give ſo proper characters, that juſter cannot be deſired according to the time they lived in. If it be thought ſufficient to know perſons by their actions, *Corneille* thought it not enough to make them act; he hath dived to the bottom of their Soul to ſearch for the principle of their Actions; he hath deſcended into their Heart, that he may ſee how their Paſſions are formed there, and diſcover the moſt hidden ways of their Motions.

As to the ancient Tragedians, either they neglect the Paſſions by applying themſelves to an exact repreſentation of what occurs, or they make Speeches amidſt the greateſt perturbations, and tell you Sentences when you are expecting trouble and deſpair.

Corneille omits nothing of what occurs, and expoſes all the Action as much as decency can allow; but alſo he gives the Thought all the extent it requires, conducing Nature without conſtraint, or abandonning her too much to her ſelf.

He hath removed from the Theater of the Ancients all that was barbarous; he hath ſweetened the horrour of their Scene by ſome tender paſſions of Love judiciouſly interwoven; but his care hath not been leſs in preſerving two tragical Subjects our Fear and Pity, without diverting the Soul from the true Paſſions that it ought to feel in them, to ſome little melancholy ſight, which

though an hundred ſeveral times varied, are, for all that ſtill the ſame.

What praiſes ſoever I give to that excellent Author, yet I will not ſay, that none but his pieces deſerve applauſe on our Theater. We have been touched with *Mariana, Sophonisbe, Alcione, Venceſlaus, Stilico, Andromache, Britanicus*, and many others, from whoſe beauty I pretend not in the leaſt to derogate becauſe I do not name them.

I avoid being tedious as much as poſſibly I can; and it ſhall be enough for me to ſay, that no Nation can diſpute with us the excellence in Tragedies.

As for thoſe of the *Italians*, it is not worth the while to ſpeak of them; to name them alone is enough to breed a diſtaſte. Their *Peter's Feaſt* would make a very patient man loſe all patience; and I never ſaw it acted but that I wiſh'd the Author of the piece had been thunder-ſtrucken with his Atheiſt.

There are four or five Engliſh Tragedies, wherein, to ſay truth, a great many things ought to be left out, yet with that reformation they might be made excellently good.

In all the reſt you ſee nothing but a ſhapeleſs and indigeſted maſs, a crowd of confuſed adventures, without conſideration of time and place, and without any regard to decency, where eyes that delight in cruel ſights may be fed with murders and bodies weltering in bloud.

To palliate the horrour of them by relations, as it is the cuſtome in *France*, is to deprive the people of the ſight that pleaſes them moſt.

The better-bred condemn a Cuſtom eſtabliſhed, through a ſenſe of humanity perhaps; but an ancient habit, or the humour of the Nation in general, prevails over the delicateneſs of private perſons.

To

To die, is ſo ſmall a matter to the Engliſh, that there is need of Images more ghaſtly than Death it ſelf to affect them: Hence it is that we upon very good ground, object to them, that they allow too much to their ſenſes upon the Stage. We muſt alſo bear with the reproach that they make to us, of paſſing to the other extremity, when amongſt us we admire Tragedies for the little tenderneſſes of Paſſion, which make not an impreſſion ſtrong enough upon the Mind; being ſometimes diſſatisfied in our hearts with an evil-formed Paſſion, we expect a fuller emotion from the action of our Comedians. And ſometimes we would have the Actor more tranſported than the Poet, lend Fury and Deſpair to an ordinary agitation, and a grief too vulgar.

The truth is, what ought to be tender is always ſoft; what ought to form Pity, ſcarcely amounts to tenderneſs; Emotion ſtands inſtead of Surprize, Aſtoniſhment, of Horrour.

Our Sentiments have not depth enough, and Paſſions not throughly touched, excite in our Souls but imperfect motions, that neither leave them to themſelves, nor tranſport them out of themſelves.

UPON COMEDIES.

FOr Comedy, which ought to be the repreſentation of the actions of common Life, in imitation of the *Spaniards*, we have made it run altogether upon Galantry, not conſidering that the Ancients made it their buſineſs to repreſent mans Life according to the diverſity of humours; and that the *Spaniards* following their own *genius* have onely painted out the life of *Madrid* in their Intrigues and Adventures.

I grant that that kind of work might have had a more noble air in Antiquity, with ſomewhat more of Gallantry too; but that was more the defect of theſe Ages than the fault of Authors. Now-a-days moſt part of our Poets know as little what belongs to Manners, as in thoſe times they knew what belonged to Galantry; one would ſay that there were no more covetous Prodigals, eaſie and ſociable humours, no more peeviſh and auſtere natures; and as if Nature her ſelf were changed, and men had laid aſide theſe various Sentiments, they are always repreſented under one and the ſame Character, for what reaſon I cannot tell, unleſs it be that the Women of this Age think all men ought to be Gallants.

We are ready to acknowledge that the Wits of *Madrid* are more fertile than ours in Inventions, and that hath made us borrow from them moſt of our Arguments, which we have filled with paſſionate and amo-

rous

rous Diſcourſes, and reduced to more regularity and probability. The reaſon is, becauſe in *Spain*, where the women are hardly ever ſeen, the Poet ſpends his imagination in contriving ingenious ways of bringing his Lovers together: And in *France*, where the liberty of Commerce is allowed, the quaintneſs of the Author is employed in the tender and amorous expreſſion of the Thoughts.

A Spaniſh Lady of Quality not long ago, was reading the Romance of *Cleopatra*, and after a long relation of Adventures, falling upon a quaint converſation of a Lover and his Miſtreſs alike paſſionate, *What a deal of wit ill-employ'd*, ſaid ſhe, *to what end ſo many fine words, when they are got together?*

It's one of the prettieſt reflections that ever I heard made in all my life; and *Calprenet*, though a Frenchman, ought to call to mind that Lovers born in a hotter Climate than that of *France*, had very little need of words on ſuch occaſions; but the good judgement of that Lady would not be received in our ordinary gallantries, wherein one muſt ſpeak a thouſand times of a Paſſion that he hath not to be able to perſwade, and meet his Miſtriſs daily to complain to her, before he find an opportunity of putting an end to that affected pain.

The *Coy thing* of *Moliere* is made ridiculous in the matter as well as in the terms, in not reading the Romance backward, when the ſerious affair of Marriage is to be treated with the Parents; but it had been no falſe nicety with a Lover to expect his declaration, and all that comes by degrees in the progreſs of a Gallantry.

It is no wonder that Regularity and Probability be leſs to be found among the *Spaniards* than the *French*; for ſince all the gallantry of the *Spaniards* is derived from the *Moors*, it retains ſtill a certain reliſh of *Africa*, that is uncoth to other Nations, and too extraordi-

nary

nary to be accommodated to the exactneſs of Rules.

Beſides, an old impreſſion of Knight-errantry, common to all *Spain*, ſets the minds of Cavaliers upon odd and freakiſh adventures. The Maids alſo from their childhood, taſte of that air in their Books of Chivalry, and in the fabulous converſations of the Women that are about them. Thus both Sexes fill their minds with the ſame Ideas, and moſt part of the men and women would interpret a ſcrupuloſity at ſome amorous extravagance, to be an indifference unworthy their Paſſion.

Though Love never obſerves very regular meaſures in any Country whatſoever; nevertheleſs I dare be bold to ſay, that it hath nothing that is very extravagant in *France*, neither in the way of making it, nor in the ordinary effects it produces. That which is called a Paſſionate love runs great riſque of being accounted ridiculous; for Gentlemen there, minding other buſineſs, give not way to it, as the *Spaniards* do in the lazineſs of *Madrid*, where nothing but Love can put them in motion.

At *Paris*, the aſſiduity of our Court engages us to the diſcharge of an Office, or the deſign of an Employment buſies us, Fortune outrivalling Miſtreſſes in a place, where it is the cuſtom to prefer that which one owes to himſelf, before that which he loves. The Ladies who are to take their meaſures accordingly, are alſo more gallant than paſſionate, nay and make uſe of Gallantry to inſinuate into Intrigues.

There are but few who are not governed by Vanity and Intereſt; and the Gallants and their Miſtreſſes vie who ſhall make the beſt uſe one of another for attaining to their end.

Love however mingles with that ſpirit of Intereſt, but it is very ſeldom the maſter; for the conduct that we are obliged to follow in affairs, ſhapes us into ſome regularity

gularity as to pleasures, or at least keeps us from extravagance.

In *Spain* there is no living without love; but what is called *to love* in *France*, to speak properly, is no more but to talk of love, and to mingle the vanity of gallantries with the sentiments of Ambition.

These differences being considered, it will not be thought strange that the Comedy of the *Spaniards*, which is no more but a representation of their Adventures, hath as little regularity as their Adventures have; and it is not to be wondred at, that the Comedy of the *French* which deviates not from their Practice, retains those respects in the representation of their Amours which commonly they have in their Loves themselves. I confess that good judgement which ought to be in all Countries of the world, establishes some things, which are no where to be dispensed with, but it is hard not to allow much to custom, since *Aristotle* himself in his Poeticks, places some times Perfection in that which was best liked at *Athens*, and not in that which is really most perfect.

Comedy hath not greater priviledges than the Laws, which though they ought all to be founded on Justice, have nevertheless particular differences, according to the different Genius of the people who made them. And if we be obliged to retain the air of Antiquity; if we must observe the character of Heroes, who have been dead Two thousand years ago, when they are to be represented upon the Stage; how is it possible not to follow the humours, and not to accommodate to the ways of those who are living, when we represent to their eyes, what they themselves daily do?

Nevertheless what authority soever Custom may give, without doubt Reason ought to have the Prerogative; but yet it ought not to be rigid in its exactness: For in things which tend onely to please, as Comedy

doth, it is uneaſie to be ſubjected to too auſtere an Order, and to begin with the rack in Subjects wherein we ſeek onely for Pleaſure.

OF THE
Italian Comedy.

SO much I had to ſay of the *French* and *Spaniſh* Comedies; I'll now tell you what I think of the *Italian*. I ſhall not ſpeak of *Amynta*, *Paſtor fido*, *Philli* of *Cyrus*, and of other Comedies of that nature. I ought to be better acquainted than I am with the graces of the *Italian* Language; for though I be touched with *Amynta*, perhaps more than any *Italian*, that's becauſe I enter into the fancy of the Poet, and have a knowledge of ſome things that are more delicate than thoſe which I have of the Verſes; beſides, in this Diſcourſe I pretend onely to ſpeak of the Comedy which appears commonly upon the Stage. What we ſee in *France* upon the *Italian* Stage, is not properly Comedy, ſeeing there is no true Plot in it; the Subject is not well linked together, no Character ſtrictly obſerved, nor Compoſition wherein the ſcope of the Genius is well diverted, at leaſt according to ſome rules of Art; here is nothing but a kind of ill formed concert amongſt ſeveral Actors, of whom every one furniſhes of his own head what he judges proper for the perſon he acts: To take it rightly, it is no more, but a medley of impertinent conceits in the mouth of Lovers, and ſilly Buffooneries in that of *Merry-Andrews*.

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You find no good ſence any where in it, but a kind of falſe Wit that predominates, either in thoughts full of Heavens, Suns, Stars, and Elements, or in an affectation of native ſimplicity, which hath nothing of true nature in it.

The Buffoons, I grant, are inimitable, and of an hundred that I have ſeen ape and imitate them, never one could come near them in Grimaces, Poſtures, Motions, Agility, Suppleneſs, and in a diſpoſition for the making of Faces, which they can ſhape and alter as they pleaſe. I cannot tell whether the Mimicks and Pantomimicks of the Ancients have much ſurpaſſed them, what wonders ſoever we read of them. It is certain that one muſt be a great lover of idle Jeſting and Drollery, to be taken with what he hears; as one muſt be alſo very grave and compoſed not to laugh at what he ſees: And it would be to affect too great a nicety, not to be pleaſed with their acting, becauſe a Critick will not be ſatisfied with their diſcourſe.

All Repreſentations wherein there is but little Wit, are tedious at long run, nevertheleſs they ſurprize, and are agreeable for ſome time before they cloy us, as Buffoonry diverts not a man of breeding, but by little intervals: It muſt be put an end to partly, and the mind not allowed time to reflect upon the exactneſs of the Diſcourſe, and the true and natural Idea of the thing: That Diſpenſation were to be deſired in the *Italian* Comedy; for one diſtaſte comes upon the heels of another with freſh irkſomneſs, and the variety inſtead of recreation, brings us onely another kind of Langor.

The truth is, when you are weary of the Buffoons that have too long kept the Stage, the Lovers ſtep in next to oppreſs you: That, in my opinion, is the worſt of puniſhments to a delicate and nice man, and one would have more reaſon to prefer a ſpeedy death before

the patience of hearing them, than the *Lacedemonian* of *Bocalini* had, when he preferred the Gallows before the long and tedious reading of the War of *Piſa*, in the Hiſtory of *Guichardin*: If any man fond of living, hath been able to ſupport ſo killing a fatigue, inſtead of ſome agreeable diverſity that may refreſh his mind; all the change he finds is the impertinence of a Doctor that puts him into deſpair. I know that to repreſent the foppery of a Doctor aright, he muſt be made to turn all his diſcourſe upon the Learning he poſſeſſes; but that without ever anſwering what is ſaid to him, he ſhould cite a Thouſand Authors, and alleadge as many paſſages with a volubility that puts him out of breath; that is to bring upon the Stage a fool who ought to be ſent to *Bedlam*, and not aptly to manage the impertinence of his Doctor.

Petronius follows a quite different method in the ridiculouſneſs of *Eumolpus*. The Pedantry of *Sidias* is otherwiſe managed by *Theophilus*, who deſerves the praiſe of having formed the moſt compleat Character that can be given to that kind of Pedants. That of *Caritides* in the *Moroſe* of *Moliere*, is altogether exact, nothing can be cut off from it, without disfiguring the whole piece. Theſe are the ridiculous Learned who may be pleaſantly repreſented upon the Stage.

But it is ſilly diverſion for a Gentleman, to preſent before him a pitiful Doctor, whom Books have made a Fool, and who, as I ſaid, ought carefully to be ſhut up, to keep from the ſight of men the frailty of our ſtate, and the miſery of our nature.

But I muſt not launch out too far in my Obſervations upon the *Italian* Comedy. To recollect then in a few words what I have enough enlarged upon; I ſay that inſtead of agreeable Lovers, you have nothing but affected talkers of Love; inſtead of natural Comedians, incomparable Buffoons, but ſtill Buffoons; inſtead of ridiculous

culous Doctors, poor mad Scholars: There is hardly any Part but what is forced; unleſs it be that of *Pantalon*, which is leaſt eſteemed, and nevertheleſs the onely that exceeds not the bounds of probability.

Tragedy was the chief delight of the ancient Commonwealth; and the old *Romans* endowed onely with a rough vertue, ſought no other examples in their Theaters, but ſuch as might fortifie their natural diſpoſition, and entertain their fierce and auſtere Habits. When the ſweetneſs of Wit for converſation, was joyned to the force of the Soul for great matters; then they began to delight alſo in Comedy, and ſometimes they were pleaſed with high Idea's, and ſometimes diverted with agreeable ones.

So ſoon as *Rome* grew corrupted, the *Romans* forſook Tragedy, and could not reliſh on the Stage an Image of ancient vertue.

From that time, to the laſt of the Commonwealth, Comedy was the refreſhment of the Great men, the diverſion of the Polite, and the amuſement of a people either grown looſe or ſoftened.

A little before the Civil Wars, the *Romans* were again animated with the ſpirit of Tragedy, their Genius ſecretly diſpoſing and preparing them for the fatal Revolutions that hapned afterward. *Cæſar* made one, and many perſons of Quality did the like alſo, as well as he: The troubles ceaſing under *Auguſtus*, and Peace being again reſtored and ſetled, all ſorts of Pleaſures were ſought after.

Comedies came in play again, the Pantomimicks had their credit, and Tragedy ſtill preſerved its reputation. Under the Reign of *Nero*, *Seneca* entertained dire Idea's, which made him write the Tragedies that he hath left to us; when Corruption was at the height, and Vice univerſal, the Pantomimicks wholly ruined both Tragedy and Comedy; Wit had no more ſhare in Plays, but

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in Postures and Motions, the eye of the Spectators sought for that which might furnish their minds with voluptuous imaginations.

The Modern *Italians* are satisfied to be enlightened by the same Sun, to breath the same Air, and to inhabit the same Land, which heretofore the ancient *Romans* inhabited: but they have left to History that severe Vertue which the *Romans* practised, and therefore think they have no need of Tragedy, to animate them to hard and difficult things which they have no mind to undertake. As they love the softness of an ordinary, and the delights of a voluptuous life, so they love to act Plays that may have a relation to both; and hence came the mixture of Comedy with the art of Mimicks which we see upon the Stage of the *Italians*. And this is almost all that can be said of the *Italians* who as yet have appeared in *France*.

All the Actors of the Company that acts at present, are generally good Comedians, unless they act Lovers: and to do them right without love or hatred, I must say that they are excellent Players, who have very bad Plays: Perhaps they can make no good ones; perhaps they have reason not to have any; for as I was objecting one day to *Cintisio* that there was not probability enough in their Pieces; he made me answer, that if there were more, good Comedians, with good Comedies might go starve.

OF THE
English Comedy.

THere is no Comedy more conform to that of the Ancients, than the *Engliſh*, in what relates to Manners; it is not a pure piece of Gallantry full of Adventures and amorous Diſcourſes, as in *Spain* and *France*; it is a repreſentation of the ordinary way of living, according to the various humours, and different characters of men. It is an Alchymiſt, who by the illuſions of his art, feeds the deceitful hopes of a vain *Curioſo*: It is a ſilly credulous perſon, whoſe fooliſh Facility is continually abuſed; it is ſometimes a ridiculous Politician, grave and compoſed, who is ſtarched in every thing, myſteriouſly jealous-headed, that thinks to find out hidden deſigns in the moſt common intentions, and to diſcover Artifice in the moſt innocent actions of life: It is a whimſical Lover, a huffing Bully, a pedantick Scholar, the one with natural Extravagancies, the other with ridiculous Affectations. The truth is, theſe tricks and ſimplicities, theſe Politicks and other Characters ingeniouſly deviſed, are carried on too far in our opinion, as thoſe which are to be ſeen upon our Stage, are a little too faint to the reliſh of the *Engliſh*; and the reaſon of that, perhaps, is that the *Engliſh* think too much, and that we commonly think not enough.

Indeed, we are ſatisfied with the firſt Images that Objects afford us; and by ſticking to the bare outſide, appearance for the moſt part ſtands us in ſtead of reality, and

and the eaſie and free of what is natural. Whereupon I ſhall ſay by the by, that theſe two laſt qualities are ſometimes moſt improperly confounded; the Eaſie and the Natural agree well enough in their oppoſition, to that which is ſtiff or forced; but when the point is to dive well into the nature of things, or the natural humour of perſons, it will be granted me, that with facility one does not always ſucceed in that: There is ſomewhat internal, ſomewhat hidden that would diſcover it ſelf to us, if we ſounded the Subjects a little more.

It is as difficult for us to enter in, as for the *Engliſh* to get out: They become Maſters of the thing they think on, though they are not of their own thought; their mind is not at reſt, when they poſſeſs their Subject; they ſtill dig when there is no more to be found, and go beyond the juſt and natural Idea which they ought to have, by too ſollicitous an enquiry.

The truth is, I have never ſeen men of better underſtanding than the *French*, who apply themſelves to conſider, and the *Engliſh*, that can releaſe themſelves from their too deep Meditations. But to return to the facility of Diſcourſe, and a certain freedom of Wit which, if poſſible, is always to be had: The beſt-bred Gentlemen in the world, are the *French* who think, and the *Engliſh* that ſpeak. I ſhall inſenſibly run out into too general Conſiderations, and therefore muſt reſume my Subject of Comedy, and paſs to a conſiderable difference that is to be found betwixt theirs and ours; and that is, that we being addicted to the regularity of the Ancients, do refer all to a principal action, without other variety than that of the means that brings us to it.

It is not to be denied but that the repreſentation of one principal Adventure ought to be the ſole ſcope and end propoſed in a Tragedy, where the Mind would feel ſome violence in the diverſions that might avocate its thought.

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The misfortune of an unhappy King, the ſad and tragical death of a great Hero, wholly confine the mind to theſe important objects, and all the variety it cares for, is to know the diverſe means that brought this principal action to paſs; but Comedy being made to divert and not to buſie us, provided Probability be obſerved, and Extravagance avoided, varieties in the opinion of the *Engliſh*, are agreeable ſurprizes, and changes that pleaſe; whereas the continual expectation of one and the ſame thing, wherein there ſeems to be no great matter of importance, neceſſarily dulls our attention.

So then inſtead of repreſenting a ſignal cheat carried on by means all relating to the ſame end: They repreſent a notable rogue with divers cheats, whereof every one produces its proper effect by its own Conſtitution. As they ſcarcely ever ſtick to the unity of action, that they may repreſent a principal perſon who diverts them by different actions: ſo many times alſo they quit that principal perſon, that they may ſhew what various things happen to ſeveral perſons in publick places; *Ben Johnſon* is much for that in his *Bartholomew Fair*. The ſame thing hath been done in *Epſom-Wells*, and in both theſe Comedies, the ridiculous adventures of theſe publick places are comically repreſented.

There are ſome other Plays which have in a manner two Arguments, that are brought in ſo ingeniouſly the one into the other, that the mind of the Spectators (which might be offended by too ſenſible a change) finds nothing but ſatisfaction in the agreeable variety they produce. It is to be confeſſed that regularity is wanting here; but the *Engliſh* are perſwaded that the liberties which are taken for better pleaſing, ought to be preferred before exact rules, of which a barren and dull Author makes it his art to importune and cloy.

Rule is to be obſerved for avoiding confuſion; good

ſence is to be followed for moderating the flight of a ſoaring imagination; but Rule muſt have no conſtraint that racks, and a ſcrupulous reaſon muſt be baniſhed, which adhering too ſtrictly to exactneſs leaves nothing free and natural.

They who cannot give to themſelves a Genius, when nature hath denied them one, aſcribe all to Art which they may acquire, and to ſet a value upon the ſole merit they have of being regular, they do what they can to damn a piece that is not altogether ſo. For thoſe that love the *Ridicule*, that are pleaſed to ſee the humour of Fops, that are affected with true Characters, they will find the ingenious *Engliſh* Comedies as much or, perhaps, more to their reliſh, than any they have ever ſeen.

Our *Moliere* whom the Ancients have inſpired with the true ſpirit of Comedy, equals their *Ben Johnſon* in well repreſenting the various humours and different ways of men, both obſerving in their deſcriptions, a true relation to the genius of their Nation: I believe they have carried that point as far as the Ancients ever did; But it is not to be denied, but that they have had greater regard to Characters than to the main of their Subjects, the deduction whereof might alſo have been more methodically linked together, and the unfolding of intrigues more natural.

Up-

UPON OPERA'S.

TO The Duke of *BUCKINGHAM.*

OF a long time, my Lord, I have had a deſire to tell you my thoughts of *Opera's*, and to ſpeak to you of the difference I find betwixt the *Italian* and *French* way of ſinging.

The occaſion that I had of ſpeaking of it at the Dutcheſs of *Mazarine*'s, hath rather encreaſed than ſatisfied that deſire; at preſent therefore, my Lord, I will ſatisfie it by the Diſcourſe I ſend you. I ſhall begin with great freedom, in telling you that I am no great admirer of Comedies in Muſick, ſuch as now-a-days we ſee. I confeſs I am pretty well pleaſed with their magnificence, the Machines have ſomething that is ſurprizing, the Muſick in ſome places is charming, the whole together ſeems marvellous; but it muſt be granted me alſo, that theſe Marvils are very tedious, for where the mind has ſo little to do, there is a neceſſity that the Senſes muſt languiſh after the firſt pleaſure that ſurprize gives us: The eyes are taken up, and at length grow weary of being continually fixed upon the Objects. In the beginning of the Conſorts, the juſtneſs of the Concords is obſerved, and nothing eſcapes of all the varieties that unite for making the ſweetneſs of Harmony; ſome time after the

Inſtuments ſtun us, and the Muſick is no more to the ears but a confuſed ſound that ſuffers nothing to be diſtinguiſhed; but who can reſiſt the tediouſneſs of Rehearſal in a modulation which hath neither the charm of Song, nor the agreeable force of Words? The Soul tired out with a long attention wherein it finds nothing to affect it, ſeeks within it ſelf ſome ſecret motion to be touched with; the Mind which in vain hath expected impreſſions from without, gives way to idle muſing, or is diſſatisfied with its own uſeleſneſs. In a word the fatigation is ſo univerſal that there is no thought but how to get out, and the onely pleaſure that remains to the languiſhing Spectators, is the hopes of ſeeing a ſpeedy end put to the ſhow. The reaſon why commonly I ſoon grow weary at *Opera's* is that I never yet ſaw any which appeared not to me deſpicable both in the diſpoſition of the Subject and in the Verſes. Now it is in vain to charm the Ears, or flatter the Eyes, if the Mind be not ſatisfied, my Soul being in better intelligence with my Mind than with my Senſes, ſtruggles againſt the impreſſions which it may receive, or at leaſt fails in giving an agreeable conſent to them, without which even the moſt delightful Objects can never afford me great pleaſure; a foppery charged with Muſick, Dances, Machines and Decorations, is a pompous foppery, but ſtill foppery; it is an ugly ground under beautiful Ornaments through which I ſee it with much diſſatisfaction. There is another thing in *Opera's* ſo contrary to nature that it offends my imagination; and that is the ſinging of the whole piece from beginning to end, as if the perſons repreſented had ridiculouſly agreed to treat in Muſick both the moſt common and moſt important affairs of their life. Is it to be imagined that a Maſter calls his Servant, or ſends him of an errand, ſinging; that one friend imparts a ſecret to another, ſinging: that men

deliberate in a Council, ſinging; that Orders in time of Battle are given ſinging; and that men are melodiouſly killed with Sword, Pike, and Musket? that's to loſe the life of repreſentation, which without doubt is preferable to that of Harmony; for Harmony ought to be no more but a bare attendant, and the great maſters of the Stage have added it as pleaſing, not as neceſſary, having regulated all that concerns the ſubject and diſcourſe. In the mean time the Idea of the Muſician goes before that of the Hero in *Opera's*: It is *Loüigi*, *Cavallo*, and *Ceſti* who are preſented to the imagination. The mind not being able to conceive a Hero that ſings, applies it ſelf to him that makes the Song; and it is not to be denied but that in the *Opera's* of the *Palais Royal*, *Baptiſta* is an hundred times more thought of than *Theſeus* or *Cadmus*. I pretend not, however, to exclude all manner of ſinging from the Stage; there are ſome things which ought to be ſung, and ſome that may be ſung without offending againſt Reaſon or Decency: Vows, Prayers, Praiſes, Sacrifices, and generally all that relates to the ſervice of the Gods, are ſung in all Nations, and in all times; tender and mournful paſſions expreſs themſelves naturally by a kind of tone; the expreſſion of a love in its birth, the irreſolution of a Soul toſſed by divers motions are ſubject matters for Stanza's, and ſo are Stanza's for a Song. All men know that Quires were introduced upon the Stages of the *Greeks*, and it is not to be denied but with as good reaſon they might be brought in upon ours. This ought to be the diſtribution, in my opinion; all that belongs to Converſation, all that relates to Intrigues and Affairs, what belongs to Council and Action, is proper for Comedians who repeat, and ridiculous in the mouth of Muſicians who ſing it. The *Greeks* made lovely Tragedies, wherein they ſang ſomewhat; the *Italians* and *French* make ugly ones, wherein they ſing all.

Would

Would you know what an *Opera* is, I'll tell you that it is an odd medley of Poeſie and Muſick, wherein the Poet and Muſician equally upon the rack the one for the other, put themſelves hard to compoſe a naughty piece: Not but that you may find agreeable words and very fine airs in it; but that you will more certainly find at length a diſlike of the Verſes, where the genius of the Poet hath been ſtinted, and a ſurfeit of the ſinging, wherein the Muſician is exhauſted by a too-long ſervice of Muſick. Did I think my ſelf capable of giving counſel to perſons of breeding who delight in the Theater, I ſhould adviſe them to reaſſume their reliſh for our good Comedies, where Dances and Muſick might be introduced, that would not in the leaſt wound the repreſentation: there they might ſing a Prologue with pleaſant diverſions; In the Interludes ſinging might animate words that ſhould be as the life of what had been repreſented; after the Play ended an Epilogue might be ſung, or ſome reflection upon the fineſt things in the Play; this would fortifie the Idea, and rivet the impreſſions that they had made upon the Spectators: Thus you might find enough to ſatisfie both the Senſes and the Mind, wanting neither the charm of ſinging in a bare repreſentation, nor the force of acting in a long continued courſe of Muſick. It remains that I give you my advice in general for all Comedies, where there is any ſinging; and that is to leave to the Poet the chief authority for the direction of the piece: The Muſick muſt be made for the Verſes, far rather than the Verſes for the Muſick. The Muſician is to follow the Poets orders, onely, in my opinion, *Baptiſta* is to be exempted, who knows the Paſſions better, and enters farther into the heart of man than the Authors. *Lambert*, without doubt, hath an excellent Genius, proper for an hundred different Muſicks, and all well managed with a juſt Oeconomy of Voices and Inſtruments:

ſtruments: there is no recitation better underſtood, nor better diverſified than his, according to the nature of Paſſions, and the quality of the Sentiments that are to be expreſſed. He ought to take from the Authors thoſe lights, which *Baptiſta* can give them, and ſubmit to direction; for *Baptiſta* through the reach of his knowledge may juſtly be the director. I will not put an end to my diſcourſe without entertaining you with the ſmall eſteem that the *Italians* have for our *Opera's*, and the great diſlike that thoſe of *Italy* give us. The *Italians* who wholly apply themſelves to Repreſentation, and to a particular care of expreſſing things, cannot endure that we ſhould give the name of *Opera* to a concatenation of Dances and Muſick, which have not an exact-enough relation and natural ſutableneſs to the Subjects. The *French* again accuſtomed to the beauty of their Entries, the delightfulneſs of their Airs, and charms of their Symphony, cannot away with the ignorance, or bad uſe of Inſtruments in the *Opera's* of *Venice*, and deny their attention to a long recitation, which becomes tedious for want of variety. I cannot properly tell you what this recitation of theirs is; but I know very well that it is neither ſinging nor reciting; it is ſomewhat unknown to the Ancients, which may be defined an ugly uſe of Song and Words. I confeſs I have found things inimitable in the *Opera* of *Loüigi*, both as to the expreſſion of thought, and the charm of Muſick; but the ordinary recitation was very cloying, inſomuch that the *Italians* themſelves impatiently expected thoſe fine parts which in their opinion came too ſeldom. I ſhall in a few words comprehend the greateſt defects of our *Opera's*; one thinks he is going to a repreſentation, where nothing will be repreſented; and expects to ſee a Comedy, but finds nothing of the life of a Comedy. So much I thought I might ſay concerning the different conſtitution of *Opera's*.

ra's. For the manner of ſinging which we in *France* call *Execution*, I think without partiality that no Nation can reaſonably vie with us in that. The *Spaniards* have an admirable diſpoſition of throat; but with their warblings and ſhakings, they ſeem to mind nothing in their ſinging, but to contend with Nightingales for the facility of the Windpipe. The *Italians* have the expreſſion counterfeit, or at leaſt forced, as not knowing exactly the nature or degree of Paſſions; It's a burſting out in laughter, rather than ſinging, when they would expreſs any ſentiment of joy; if they would ſigh, you ſhall hear ſobs with violence formed in the throat, and not ſighs which unawares eſcape from the paſſion of an amorous heart; of a doleful reflection they make the ſtrongeſt exclamations; the tears of an abſence are the mournings of a Funeral; ſadneſs becomes ſo ſorrowful in their mouths, that in grief they roar rather than complain; and ſometimes they expreſs the languiſhing of a paſſion, as a natural fainting. Perhaps there may be at preſent ſome alteration in their way of ſinging, and that by converſing with us they are advantaged as to the neatneſs of a polite *execution*, as we are emproved by them as to the beauties of a ſtronger and bolder compoſition. There are Comedies in *England* wherein there is much Muſick; but it is impoſſible for me to ſpeak more diſcreetly of it, I cannot accuſtom my ſelf to the *Engliſh* ſinging. I came too late to find a reliſh in that which is ſo different from all others. There is no Nation that ſhews greater courage in the Men, more beauty in the Women, nor more wit in both Sexes. One cannot have all things, where ſo many good qualities are common, it is not ſo great a misfortune that a good judgement in ſinging is rare; it is certainly very rarely to be met with there; but they in whom it is to be found, have it as nice and delicate as any people in the world,

world, as exceeding moſt part of their Nation in an exquiſite air, and moſt happy conſtitution. *Solus Gallus cantat*, none but the *French-man* ſings; I will not be injurious to all other Nations in maintaining what an Author hath publiſhed, *Hiſpanus flet, dolet Italus, Germanus boat, Flander ululat, & ſolus Gallus çantat*, I leave to him all theſe pretty diſtinctions, and ſhall onely back my opinion by the authority of *Loüigi*, who could not endure that the *Italians* ſhould ſing Airs, after that he had heard Mr. *Vyert*, *Hilaire*, and *La Petite Varenue* ſing. Upon his return to *Italy* he made all the Muſicians of the Nation his Enemies, ſaying openly at *Rome*, as he had ſaid at *Paris*, that to make pleaſant Muſick, *Italian* Airs muſt be in a French mouth. He made little account of our Songs, except *Beauſſets*, which gained his admiration: He admired the Conſort of our Violins, our Lutes, Harpſi-cords and Organs: he was raviſhed at his firſt hearing the great Bells of St. *Germain de Prez*: and how would he have been charmed with our Flutes, if they had been in uſe in thoſe times? It is moſt certain, that he was much diſguſted with the harſhneſs and rudeneſs of the greateſt Maſters of *Italy*, when he had taſted the ſweetneſs of the touch, the neatneſs and manner of the *French*.

I ſhould be too partial, if I inſiſted only upon our advantages: there is no people that have a ſlower apprehenſion both for the ſound of words, and for humouring the thought of the Compoſitor than the *French*, there are but few that leſs underſtand the quantity, and that with greater difficulty find the pronunciation; but after that by long ſtudy they have ſurmounted all theſe difficulties, and that they are maſters of what they ſing, nothing takes like to them. The ſame thing happens to us upon Inſtruments, and particularly in Conſorts, where there is nothing very ſure nor juſt,

till after an infinite number of repetitions; but nothing ſo neat nor ſo polite, when once the repetitions are accompliſhed. The *Italians* profound in Muſick bring their art to our ears without any ſweetneſs. The *French* not ſatisfied to take from the skill the firſt harſhneſs that ſhews the labour of the Compoſition; they find in the ſecret of execution, as it were a charm for our Souls, and I know not what that touches, which they carry home to the very heart. I forgot to ſpeak to you of the Machines, ſo eaſie it is to forget things which one would willingly have laid aſide: Machines may ſatisfie the curioſity of ingenious people for the mathematical Inventions, but they'll ne'er pleaſe perſons of good judgement in the Theatre; the more they ſurprize, the more they divert the mind from attending to the Diſcourſe; and the more admirable they are, the impreſſion of that rarity leaves the leſs tenderneſs and exquiſite perception in the Soul which it needs, for being touched or charmed with the Muſick.

The Ancients made no uſe of Machines, but when there was a neceſſity of bringing in ſome God; nay, and the Poets themſelves were almoſt always lookt upon as ridiculous for ſuffering themſelves to be reduced to that neceſſity. If men love to be at expences, let them lay out their money upon lovely Decorations, the uſe whereof is more natural and more agreeable than that of Machines. Antiquity which made Gods no ſtrangers to Poets, and expoſed them even in their Chimney-corners; that Antiquity, I ſay, how vain and credulous ſoever, expoſed them nevertheleſs but very rarely upon the Stage. Now the belief of them is gone, the *Italians* in their *Opera's* have re-eſtabliſhed the Heatheniſh Gods in the world, and have not bogled to entertain men with theſe ridiculous Vanities,

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provided they might make their Pieces look great by the introduction of that dazling and ſuprizing appearance; theſe divinities of the Stage have long enough abuſed *Italy*, which being happily undeceived at length, does now renounce the ſame Gods which it had recalled, and returns to things which in truth have not the ſame exactneſs, but which are not ſo cumberſome, and with a grain of indulgence not to be rejected by men of ſenſe.

It hath happened to us in the matter of Gods and Machines, as it happens almoſt daily to the *Germans* about our Modes and Faſhions, we juſt take up what the *Italians* have laid aſide. And as if we would make amends for the fault of being prevented in the invention, we run into exceſs in a cuſtom which they impertinently introduced, but which they managed with reſerve. In truth we cover the Earth with Deities, and make them dance and deſcend in Troops, whereas they made them deſcend but ſparingly, on the moſt important occaſions. As *Arioſto* wronged the grandeur of Poems by incredible Fabuloſity, ſo we wrong Fabuloſity by a confuſed muſter of Gods, Shepherds, Hero's, Enchanters, Apparitions, Furies, and Devils.

I admire *Baptiſta* as well for the divertion of Dances, as for what concerns the Voices and Inſtruments; but the Conſtitution of our *Opera's* muſt appear very extravagant to thoſe who are true Judges of Probability and ſurprizing Grandeur; nevertheleſs one runs risk of having his Judgement called in queſtion, if he dare to ſhew it; and I adviſe others, when they hear any diſcourſe of the *Opera*, to make their knowledge a ſecret to themſelves. For my part, who have paſt the age and time of ſignalizing my ſelf in the world by the ſpirit of modes, and the merit of Fancy, I am reſolved to

ſtrike

ſtrike in with good ſenſe, for all it is ſo forſaken, and to follow Reaſon though in diſgrace with as much aſſiduity as if it were ſtill in chief vogue. That which vexes me moſt at this madneſs for *Opera's*, is that they tend directly to the ruine of the fineſt thing we have, which is moſt proper for elevating the Soul, and moſt capable to form the mind. After this long diſcourſe let us conclude, that the Conſtitution of our *Opera's* cannot be more defective than it is. But it is to be acknowledged at the ſame time, that no man can perform more than *Lully* upon an ill-conceived Subject, and that it is not eaſie to outdo *Quinant* in what is demanded of him.

FINIS.

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